

A TEST FOR DEMOCRATS

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under a previous order of the House, the gentlewoman from the District of Columbia [Ms. NORTON] is recognized for 5 minutes.

Ms. NORTON. Mr. Speaker, I come to the floor this evening to appeal to good sense and good government and accommodation consistent with principle on my side and on the other side. Today there have been requests to the GOP leadership to consider that AFDC checks are due to go out with no one to send them out, to consider that the District of Columbia Government is up and running without the necessary authority. One of the leaders offered that in the State of California it was not clear that Medicaid bills could be paid.

On the Democratic side, occasionally I have heard what the other side has become more closely identified with. That is a kind of all or nothing response. I must tell you, Mr. Speaker, my heart is with the all or nothing response, because my largest employer is the Federal Government and its Federal employees in my own district who are being penalized as they sit home waiting to be called back to work on an involuntary furlough. But at least my Federal employees have been promised by the majority that they will be paid.

What promise has been made to children on AFDC that they will be paid before Christmas or that those on Medicaid will be paid before Christmas and, God help us, that the Nation's Capital will be standing before Christmas?

It is time for cool and mature heads to consider what is at stake. This is a real test for my side of the aisle, I must say, for we have gotten up consistently this year to speak for the poor, to speak for those who cannot speak for themselves. I do not see how it would be possible for us to go home for Christmas and tell people that we had said that, if it all does not come through, then no way AFDC will come through, no D.C. will come through, no Medicaid will come through. In that case we have adopted the tactics of the other side.

Both sides need to step back. I appreciate, frankly, that the majority is willing to consider relieving those most in need of relief by some kind of special CR and have only said that this should not be the subject of great contention. This is a test for my side. Do you mean it or not, or is it only the Members of Congressional Black Caucus who mean it or the Hispanic Caucus who mean it, or the women who mean it, or do all the Democrats mean it? Do the Republicans mean it? Can we put aside as Christmas dawns our rancor to say we do not want to go home, and say to poor children on welfare, I am sorry, your check will come sometime in the future?

For us, a missed check may get us over. For people on welfare, a missed check means no food and no shelter for far too many. For the District of Columbia, it is a shameful day when we

have abandoned our constitutional responsibility and said to the District, well, we will reach out and get you when we can. Meanwhile, you are on your own.

Eighty-five percent of the money up here that we cannot get out because no appropriation has been passed is money raised in the District of Columbia from District taxpayers. There is a moral obligation, especially on these three issues, not to say all or nothing, not to get up and make some kind of vein motion knowing it will lose and, therefore, toss us all out.

There is a moral obligation on this side and this side to say, at the very least, we will call a truce when it comes to poor children on welfare who will not be fed and might be put out on the street before Christmas. We will call a truce when it comes to whether or not 600,000 people in the District of Columbia will have a government that is open and collecting trash and doing what government must do for people to keep going. We will call a truce when it comes to Medicaid. Is that what we want? It is not what we want. But if we have gotten the majority to understand that they must consider that, how can we pull back now?

It is a test and we must look at each and every one of us to see whether any of us causes this test to be failed. We must take it into account. If, after all, we have had to say about children and about the poor, we are willing, we are willing to stand here and allow checks to be missed for them, it is a test. Either we mean it or we do not. Whose principles are these? Who do we speak for? Can we pass the test?

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under a previous order of the House, the gentleman from Georgia [Mr. COLLINS] is recognized for 5 minutes.

[Mr. COLLINS of Georgia addressed the House. His remarks will appear hereafter in the Extensions of Remarks.]

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under a previous order of the House, the gentleman from New Jersey [Mr. MARTINI] is recognized for 5 minutes.

[Mr. MARTINI addressed the House. His remarks will appear hereafter in the Extensions of Remarks.]

BUDGET NEGOTIATIONS

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under a previous order of the House, the gentleman from Pennsylvania [Mr. GEKAS] is recognized for 5 minutes.

Mr. GEKAS. Mr. Speaker, there is not a dime's difference between the two major political parties, was the observation of a political writer some years ago. I think that that description can be in a broader sense applied to the negotiations that are now taking place even as we speak and which have so much to do with the eventual outcome of the cherished balanced budget.

Why do I say there is very little difference in applying it to the current negotiations? If we would recall only in a brief recent history, the President of the United States, when he was candidate Clinton, offered a tax cut and said that, when he became President, he would make certain that the middle class would at his hands receive a middle class tax cut, much needed tax cut.

When the current negotiations began, one of the big issues was whether or not we should have a tax cut. So it seems that both parties, the Republicans, who want this tax cut and who have promised it in the Contract with America, have matched the President, who offered it when he was candidate Clinton in the 1992 elections. So has not the issue of tax cuts been resolved once and for all? Should not the American people expect a tax cut?

If they have agreed on that, what are they arguing about with respect to whether or not there should be a tax cut? President Clinton, after he became the Chief Executive, criticized the Republican tax cut as being unworthy of consideration for one reason or another. Yet he has proposed a tax cut. Now let us skip over to the other big element in the negotiations: Medicare reform.

The Republicans are being excoriated on an hourly basis by the opposition on their daring to try to slow the growth of Medicare. Will we not recall, Mr. Speaker, that it was the President and the President's people who first brought that consideration before the public by offering, in the 1993 session, 1993, the first year of that session, a plan to slow the growth of Medicare? So now the second largest issue which is on the table in these present negotiations is also one on which the major parties show that there is not a dime's worth of difference between them.

The President's people want the Medicare growth to slow. The Republicans offer as part of the balanced budget the slowing of the growth of Medicare. What is left to negotiate? It seems to me that all that is left is proportions of those two elements. We ought to be able to settle it.

My gosh, I would be willing to do anything to have the President actually agree to the balanced budget. Maybe we could offer the President, look, Mr. President, perhaps we, the Republicans, would offer you, you take your choice. Take the Medicare proposals that are offered by the Republicans, and we will give you your tax cut. That way both parties, both sides of the table will have earned something on which they both agree.

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They both want a tax cut, they both want Medicare reform. The President now takes the Republican version of Medicare, and we give him his version of a tax cut.

I know that that will not work, but the point should be made clear to the American people that both sides are